

# BANANAS CHOOSING CHILD CARE HANDOUT

## Changes, Changes, and New Beginnings: Thoughts on Changing Child Care Situations

Changes in child care situations can occur at any time, and saying good-bye is often difficult. Some children face change with ease; others do not. Parents and child care providers working together can prepare a child to meet the demands of changing situations and to understand the importance of old friends as well as new ones. Although this handout pertains to out-of-home child care situations, many of the suggestions are applicable to in-home care as well.

### What Parents Can Do

Think through your reasons for changing care before taking any action. If you're satisfied with the child care, you may decide, for example, that a longer drive from a new home is preferable to searching for a new program. If your reasons for changing are based on dissatisfaction with the care, you should probably first discuss your concerns with the provider and attempt to reach agreement on the issues in conflict. BANANAS' staff is available to mediate minor disputes if both parties think we can be of help. Visiting other programs at this time may convince you that even with some areas of disagreement, you and your child are better off staying. Or, you may decide to go ahead with changing care. Remember that once you've given your provider notice, it can be difficult to reverse your plans. Take your time in making this important initial decision.

Parents should give a child care provider as much notice as possible. A two-week notice seems minimal; a month would be better. Many times the contract signed between parent and provider determines the length of notice and should be honored. Telling the provider might be difficult. Some parents may feel comfortable saying "I will be changing jobs soon, and I would like John to go to child care closer to my work. It's going to be so hard to change care." For others, a brief statement "John will be leaving care at the end of the month" is enough. A notice period gives everyone involved the opportunity to think and talk about the change. Leaving a family child care home may be especially difficult because of the close personal feelings which develop between the provider and the family. If your child is at a center, be sure that all the staff knows about the departure. If your child has a favorite staff member, ask the center director if you can speak directly to that person so you are sure s/he knows when your child will be leaving.



Other suggestions:

1. Examine your feelings about leaving the child care program. You may feel sad, guilty, angry, relieved and/or ambivalent about the transition. Once you analyze the situation you could realize that you need to make plans to get yourself, as well as your child, through this change. You might also discover you and your child experience a different degree of anxiety. Don't project your feelings onto your child. At the same time, don't assume because you have few concerns the same holds true for your child. You may be able to evaluate your child's reactions more objectively if you can identify your own feelings.
2. Be clear with your child about when the last day will be. Try not to tell them too soon (one or two weeks is plenty, depending on the age of your child – the younger the child, the shorter the time should be). If you tell your provider before you tell your child, be sure the provider knows that you want to be the person who tells the child about the change.
3. If you have to leave a home or center suddenly, even a day's warning or preparation is well worth the effort. Give your child a clear and simple explanation about what has happened and tell them that you will be discussing the situation with the provider. If the sudden parting involves some disagreement, do not ask your child to take sides or get involved. Be sure to discuss the dispute with the provider when your child is not present.

4. Choose the new program with care. Visit a number of programs before committing yourself and your child. If you are confident about the new situation and trust the program, you will be able to communicate this trust to your child. Try to show your child in words and deeds the positive feelings you have for the new program.
5. Take your child for a short visit to the new home or center. Plan on spending enough time for the child to say hello to the new staff and to look around and get a feel for the new situation. If you ask your child a leading question like “How do you like the new place?” be prepared for “I don’t,” “I won’t go,” “It looks yucky!” Children are usually very loyal and may feel they are “betraying” their old friends for new and, as yet, unknown ones.
6. Share this Handout with both your present and your future child care programs and enlist their aid. You may want to arrange with the provider whose care you’re leaving a way for your child to get involved in saying good-bye, for instance, by bringing a farewell treat the last day.
7. Don’t feel like you’ve failed if your child is upset about leaving a program. It is sad to leave old friends and familiar surroundings. Prepare yourself for some tears or “acting out” and give yourself a little extra time the last day for final good-byes. Children should feel free to express their emotions even if your feelings are different. Although you can point out the new horizons that lie ahead, your child may not feel positive about the new child care situation until s/he has had time to adjust.
8. Think about and then discuss with your child any changes in routine or schedule that will occur as a result of changing care – like getting up earlier, eating breakfast away from home, driving with an adult other than you, etc. If your child has changed child care situations before, s/he will probably be able to draw parallels from those previous changes.
9. Acceptance of a new situation always takes time. If possible, leave a very young or resistant child at the new program for a short time at first and then gradually increase the stay. You may feel guilty about leaving a reluctant or upset child. Discuss your feelings with the new provider. S/he can help both of you let go when it’s time.
10. After the move, pay attention to your child’s feelings. Help your child think about the changes with simple statements like “Maybe you miss \_\_\_\_; I can understand that” or “Perhaps your day is very different now.” Recognize how important changes are to children by allowing them to express their feelings. Some children

get used to a new child care situation in a short time. For other children, the adjustment is more difficult and they may cry or refuse to go to the new program. If the parent remains calm and enlists the aid of the new provider, the experience can usually become a positive one. After several weeks, your child will help you know how the new child care is going in actions and behavior – talking about the day, eating and sleeping well at home, being active and cheerful. But if you still have concerns at this time because your child is not entirely happy about going to child care, talk to the new provider and/or call the BANANAS Warmline: 658-7353.

### **What You Can Do With Your Child**

Children may need some encouragement to face the change. Here are some activities a parent or provider can suggest:

1. Play games or act out situations which involve change and leaving; suggest to your child that a favorite doll is going to visit a new school and see what happens.
2. Say good-bye by drawing a picture or writing a letter to the provider s/he is leaving. If appropriate, the child may want to select a small present for the provider (soap, handkerchief, etc.) or give the program a toy s/he is willing to give away.
3. Make a scrapbook of the old child care situation (with your help). It could include the child’s drawings, pictures drawn by other children or photos of the program.
4. If possible, after the situation has settled down, call or visit with the staff or friends from the old child care situation. This can help children know that important people and places don’t cease to exist after they leave.

### **What The “Old” Child Care Program Can Do**

The provider’s role is especially crucial. Your help can make a smooth transition for the parents and the child.

1. If possible, take a picture of all the children together. Have a copy made for yourself and one to give the child. Don’t forget to somehow get yourself in the picture. If the child has been in your care for some time, your picture will be more important than the playmates!
2. Plan a small farewell party at lunch or snack time. Be sure the other children know in advance the purpose of the party, perhaps using a simple statement like, “John is going to a new child care program and I will miss him.”
3. Remember to talk about the child after s/he is gone. This will help children who miss their friend learn to separate. This will also show children that you value them and will miss them too, if they should leave.

- Maintain contact with the family, if possible. Write or call the child soon after the departure so the child knows you care.
- If the child is leaving the program at your request, the situation is more complex for you and the family. Providers, like parents, need to keep children out of disputes. If you initiated this change because the child's developmental needs weren't being met, give the parent that information through statements like this, "Susan seems bored in child care because all the other children are so much younger. I think she would enjoy being around children closer to her age." Such suggestions help parents search for a new program which will better fit the child's needs. Try to encourage the parents to participate in the discussion.

### What The "New" Child Care Program Can Do

Making a child feel welcome in a new program is important. Here are some suggestions which may work for you:

- Convey to the parent your ability and willingness to work with the family during this transition. It is comforting for parents to know you have experience with children who may be insecure, sad or anxious when they first enter care.
- Encourage a new child, especially a very young or reluctant child, to bring a favorite toy or blanket to child care. Bringing a "piece of home" along can help.
- Ask an "old-timer" from your program to show the new child around. Children can sometimes break the ice faster than adults – the sooner the child makes friends in care, the smoother the change should be.
- It may be helpful to maintain a little distance with a child who is having trouble adjusting. Some children respond better if they are allowed to "warm up" to a provider or program at their own speed.
- Talk to the child about the old child care situation. Neutral questions like "What do you miss the most about your last program?" or "What is different about this child care program?" can give you some clues about how to make the child more at ease.
- After a reasonable period (3-4 weeks), share with the parent any concerns you may have about a child who is having trouble adjusting. The parent may have some good suggestions for you. You may have a better perspective on the situation, if, for example, you find out that the child reacted in the same manner at the last program but eventually adjusted. If the parent gives you permission, a chat with the former provider may also give you ideas about how to help a child.

### How Many Changes Are Too Many Changes?

While children are able to adjust and adapt to many changes in their lives, stability in their child care situations is still very much worth pursuing. Many young children spend as much or more time in child care as they do at home with their parents. If a parent changes child care fairly frequently, is never satisfied with the programs s/he selects or feels that changing programs is the only way to settle a dispute, the situation may warrant a closer evaluation.

It can be useful to talk to someone – a friend, a staff member at BANANAS, a counselor – about these constant changes. If a parent has a choice about working and feels extremely ambivalent about using child care, maybe the additional family income isn't worth the anxiety which results from working. If the parent doesn't know how to resolve differences with providers constructively, some assertiveness training or counseling might be a better answer than moving from program to program. Some parents need to face the fact that the "perfect" child care program isn't just waiting out there. Give and take and minor disagreements occur in all child rearing and child caring situations. Some changes are inevitable due to family circumstances (moving, changing jobs, etc.) and some changes are made in the child's best interest (shorter commute time, smaller group size, larger group size, etc.). However, changes for little or no reason are not beneficial to the child, the parent or the provider.

### Good-byes

Leaving a child care situation isn't easy no matter what your reasons are for changing care. However, with some thought and planning you can provide a smoother transition for your child. We hope this handout has given you ideas which will lead to positive changes and new beginnings.

BANANAS has many more free handouts to help you select child care for your child:

- Child Care Issues For Expectant & New Parents
- Choosing Family Child Care
- Choosing Infant/Toddler Child Care
- A Closer Look at Large Family Child Care Homes
- Choosing a Child Care Center



- Choosing A Preschool Setting
- Subsidized Child Care
- Parent-Created Child Care
- Separating From Infants and Toddlers
- Choosing Schoolage Child Care
- Choosing Child Care For A Child With Special Needs
- What Babies Need in Child Care -- Birth to One Year
- What Toddlers Need in Child Care -- Age 1 through 2 years
- What Preschoolers Need in Child Care -- Age 3 through 5 years
- What School-Age Children Need in Child Care -- Age 6 to 8 years

To obtain copies by mail, send one first-class postage stamp for every three handouts. If you want a copy of our *BANANAS' Publications List*, which lists all of our free and low-cost publications call us at (510) 658-7353, or send your request to BANANAS, 5232 Claremont Avenue, Oakland, CA 94618. Our handouts can also be downloaded from the BANANAS website at [www.bananasinc.org](http://www.bananasinc.org).

In addition, BANANAS has an extensive video library with more than a dozen videos on the topic of choosing child care, including "Who's Minding the Kids? A Parents' Guide to Quality Child Care" and "My Kind of Place: Identifying Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers." To view a full listing of our videos and DVDs, check our website at [bananasinc.org](http://bananasinc.org), or request our BANANAS Video List. Videos are available for loan at our office with a \$50 deposit.

For more information about child care options and referrals to new providers or programs, call BANANAS' Referral Line at (510) 658-0381.

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